



FRED W. McDARRAH

Judy Pfaff and Ursula von Rydingsvard: Zymunt (1992)

# Double Bed

## By Arlene Raven

### Judy Pfaff and Ursula von Rydingsvard: *Zygmunt*

"Life After Postmodernism"

The Cultural Space/

The Laboratory

336 Canal Street

Through March 14

*Zygmunt* performance by the

First World/El Primer Mundo

Previews March 6 and 7, 8 p.m.

Performances March 12, 13, 14,

19, 20, 21, 8 p.m.

*Like Martin used to say, the universe has a moral center like, like its great gravitational center. . . . It's irresistible. Like the sun. It's the point where all books close, all arguments end, all politics come together. As long as you have a fix on that moral center, everything else falls into place.*

—Jesse Jackson, quoted by Marshall Frady in *The New Yorker*, February 17, 1992

A hot and holy center so compelling—whether physiological or psychic—begs faith in its palpable origin and belief in its transcendental vision. When such heat kindles the core of humans, the delicious glow in your gut promises that that euphoric phenomenon in our personal navels may also be universally phenomenal.

At those rare moments, just about everything feels consummate and whole. My first such rhapsody, a longsome gaze in front of a painting by Rogier van der Weyden, in a Philadelphia museum, of Christ taken from the

cross transported and intoxicated me so much that I peered about the gallery to see if anyone had noticed my sudden surprise ecstasy.

Van der Weyden's subject was dolorous, not blissful. But his exquisite portrayal of a lighter-than-air Jesus, wounded and dying against a luminiferous golden ground, challenged the universal reality of suffering and the inevitability of death.

I did not cleave to Jesus himself. My infatuation was, instead, with artistry. That striking instance of invention allowed my feet eventually to depart from the road taken by all decent girls as outlined by my mother. I began, instead, to cherish a path I had never before even glimpsed but to which I now aspired.

Forty years later, an often chilling universal existence, marked by the ticking of body-and-soul-terminating time bombs, has necessarily modified my maiden ideals and compromised the original paradigms of my youth. But knotty problems of academic aesthetics or nagging enigmas about Masters of the History of Art have not replaced my first fires. The same intensity that forged my visceral childhood fixation for the world of visual and literary culture remains my most vital inspiration.

**Papo Colo's** "Life After Postmodernism," a series of collaborations between pairs of artists at his new exhibition location, reflects some of the same radiance. Moreover, the Cultural Space at

least rekindles the desire and hope of fogy activists of the '60s and '70s like me.

The Cultural Space is one of few new efforts in these financially devastating times that directs its fragile flame to the 1992 New York City art environment. Written curatorial goals accent Colo's interest in the lives of the artists he has chosen and anticipate their unique combustion in the cauldron of the series.

The implications of the Cultural Center and of Colo's innovations in the roles of curator and director are crucial and far-reaching. His couplings for "Life After Modernism" serve his vision of generating an arena for the frictional impact of materials and melding kinship of ideals between people.

*Zygmunt*, by veterans of excellence and originality Judy Pfaff and Ursula von Rydingsvard, is monumental and elegant, suspended in almost the entire physical space of the 550-square-foot rectangular exhibition area. The room has been painted white from floor to ceiling, gallery style, to surround *Zygmunt* as if the weighty sculpture were rather a buoyant solar system in an atmosphere of cumulus clouds.

Presented in such a way that the character and identity of each artist and her art is distinguished, the materials of *Zygmunt* are also beautifully integrated. Perhaps the fact that Pfaff and Rydingsvard work in studios in the same Williamsburg building further encouraged their artistic affinity.

Pfaff's swerving steel lines of

found objects like bedsprings—rusted to or painted in copper, aluminum, and pitch tones—have been abstracted from their utilitarian beginnings, and even further removed as matter by appearing as shadows on the backlit wall beside the tangled mass. Six disks of concentric silver rings each measuring 20 inches in diameter careen through the kinetic field of connecting lines like the visible tracks of planets and their moons in a magnetic galaxy. A 41-inch cylinder contains six golden circles within.

Pfaff's frenetic angular arches rest on top of von Rydingsvard's fragrant and welcoming graphite-finished floating cedar bed lying eight inches off the floor (actually heavy with numerous units of four-by-four-inch soft cedar beams of between eight and 10 feet long held up by 17 steel jacks made by Pfaff, under a steel frame).

Heraclitus believed that even sleepers are collaborators in what goes on in the universe and are thus equally as responsible as artists and curators for society's sorry state of affairs. But what are the sleepers, or for that matter many artists and curators, doing about it?

The extent to which the ambitious aspirations of the Cultural Space can and will be achieved as it matures as an institution remains to be seen. And as in any grassroots organization for social change, the Cultural Space will experience inconsistencies among theory, practice, and the larger po-

litical environment in which they are enacted—the natural human condition that inevitably leaves a gap between ideals and their implementation. But there is already a spark here that could ignite art and ideas that will mean what they say and say what they mean—no matter how difficult, utopian, or even currently unrealistic they may seem.

Colo predicted that biographical encounters between artists

# Art

such as Pfaff and von Rydingsvard would be "cultural collisions." "Culture," the modifier, brings shape and scheme to the chaotic crash and clash of collisions.

"Culture" is not only a social milieu deliberately composed, but a physical medium designed especially to incite breeding. Hence "The Laboratory"—a key concept of the Cultural Space. The Laboratory could be a crucible for catharsis, relationships, and, possibly, unexpected explosions of knowledge and insight; a place where work can be understood apart from divisive stereotypes of gender, race, and ethnic origin. A place that does not defer or deny differences but draws us irresistibly into that moral center in the sun, where books can close because all tales have been told. For the moment. ■